

## Sūrah Ikẖlās

### Central Theme

This *sūrah* is among those *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān the very name of which reveals its central theme. It is called *ikẖlās* which is precisely what the *sūrah* is all about. *Ikẖlās* means to have faith in God's being and His attributes or in the essential requisites of His attributes in a way that eliminates any trace of associating others with Him. As far as accepting God is concerned, the world has always acknowledged the existence of a superior being. In fact, this acceptance must be regarded as a self-evident requirement of human nature. An equally stark reality is that Satan has always remained an eternal enemy of *tawẖīd* (oneness of God). He has persisted in trying to deceive man in this matter by contaminating this concept such that believing Allah at times became tantamount to not believing Him. To illuminate the essentials of *tawẖīd*, God sent forth a long series of Prophets. Unfortunately, time and again, man continued to squander this reality every time he acquired it. It was for the sake of *tawẖīd* that the Prophet Abraham (sws) migrated from his people and established the abode of his children in a barren stretch of land -- where they could truly worship God and also remain shielded from the onslaughts of an idolatrous environment. Quite ironically, his own progeny gradually converted the centre of *tawẖīd* (The Ka'bah) built by himself into a temple of idols, as is mentioned in the Qur'ān. The prejudice of their self-carved idols became so intense that they vehemently argued with God and His last Prophet (sws) that until and unless the status of their idols is accepted, they would not acknowledge the rights of God. It was as a result of this outrageous attitude that the Prophet (sws) proclaimed his acquittal from them as is mentioned in Sūrah Kāfirūn.

### Period of Revelation

The proclamation of acquittal was solely meant for the Quraysh and the Idolaters of Makkah. Various tribes of the People of the Book also existed in Arab. Although they were the recipients of holy books, Satan had inveigled them too into horrible forms of polytheism. They had considerable influence in Madīnah and its whereabouts, and the Arabs had always openly acclaimed their superiority in religious affairs.

As long as the Prophet (sws) was in Makkah, their opposition remained

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clandestine, but it turned into open hostility after he migrated to Madīnah. The People of the Book arrogantly reckoned that since they were the recipients of Holy Books, the Qur'ān would definitely regard their beliefs and deeds as superior to those of the Idolaters. But the Qur'ān made it very clear to them that as far as their beliefs and deeds were concerned, they were a disgrace to mankind. The Christians, particularly, were impelled into open antagonism like the Jews by the criticism of the Qur'ān on their forms of polytheism. A united opposition front was thereby created as the Jews, the Christians and the Idolaters became allies against the Islamic forces. The situation called for a comprehensive explication of the meaning of *ikhhlās* that should completely eliminate any shred of polytheism, and as a result of which the People of the Book and the Idolaters should have no doubt about the actual truth. It was in these circumstances that this *sūrah* was revealed in Madīnah. Although a group of scholars believes that its revelation took place in Makkah, the comprehensive nature of the *sūrah*, as will be explained later, testifies that it was revealed in Madīnah when the enmity of the people of the Book, especially, the Christians had become evident.

### Placement in the Qur'ān

This *sūrah* is placed after Sūrah Lahab. This is an indication of the fact that after the destruction of the biggest foe of Islam (as depicted in Sūrah Lahab), time is ripe for the proclamation of the essence of *tawhīd* once again in this land, for which Abraham (sws) had built the House of God. Hence, in this *sūrah*, the basic Islamic teaching of *tawhīd* is forcefully asserted. Prior to Sūrah Lahab, the glad tidings of the victory of the Islamic forces are already given in Sūrah Naṣr.

The Prophet's struggle against his enemies, as we all very well know, had nothing to do with worldly gains; rather it had the purpose before it of establishing the Kingdom of God in the pagan Arabian society, and in banishing all forms of polytheism from there. Consequently, every aspect of *tawhīd* is highlighted in this *sūrah*. The Qur'ān actually ends with it because the last pair of *sūrahs* which succeed it are in fact more like two sentinels guarding this treasure of *tawhīd* from Satan's tampering.

### Relation to the Overall Arrangement

The overall arrangement of the Qur'ān is such that the beginning and the end are very similar. The end of the Qur'ān converges to the topic with which it commences – *tawhīd* and *ikhhlās*. Sūrah Fātiḥah and Sūrah Ikhhlās, the beginning and the end of the Qur'ān distinctly bring out the reality that the concept of *tawhīd* encompasses all our beliefs. It is mentioned in Sūrah Fātiḥah that God is the sole Cherisher and Sustainer

of the worlds and Master of the Day of Judgement, and as such we all must always express our gratitude to Him. Here, in this *sūrah*, the attributes that wipe out any trace of polytheism are explained positively as well as negatively, which actually forms the basis of the study of *Tawhīd*. Moreover, it should also be kept in mind that the *sūrahs* which constitute this last group are fundamental to the study of Islam.

### Text and Translation

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ (١) اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ (٢) لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ (٣) وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ (٤)

Say: “That God, is alone. He is with every one. He is neither anyone’s father nor anyone’s son; and there is none like Him.”

### Explanation

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ (١)<sup>1</sup>

The word قُلْ is a command that means “to proclaim”, “to declare”, “to openly announce something” so that every person becomes fully aware of it and there remains no ambiguity about it, leaving no room for further arguments. The word is used in this very sense in the opening verse of Sūrah Kāfirūn as well.

The need for such a declaration only arises when after a long period of dialogue and debate, it becomes clear that the truth has been fully disclosed, and people are now indulging in debate only to prolong and complicate matters. In such cases, it is better to say whatever one has to in a stern and decisive manner so that the addressees become aware that everything about the subject has been said; no more time will now be wasted upon the issue and it is equally unlikely that any change in stance shall occur.

The word هُوَ in the opinion of this writer is the pronoun of the fact (*ḍamīr al-sha’n*), which is used when the implied meaning or situation is so clearly understood between the speaker and to whom it is addressed that the mind instinctively jumps to it. (JS is this the correct definition)

After the advent of Islam, the concepts of God’s being and His attributes were hot subjects of debate. Such was the dominance of these issues that the other Islamic beliefs of Prophethood and Life in the Hereafter were only partially discussed. The question of *tawhīd* was the most important. The Quraysh had made it their own as well as their forefathers’ point of prestige and were in no way willing to bear the defamation of their deities or of their forefathers’ who had worshiped them. The Qur’ān in many places has cited instances when they would fume with rage and would get

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1. Say: That God is alone.

ready to pounce upon the preachers of this concept whenever the concept of *tawhīd* was brought up in front of them. On the one hand, was this vanity and ego of the Quraysh and on the other was the resoluteness of the Qur'ān and the Prophet (sws) that there shall be no compromise whatsoever between monotheism and polytheism.

As long as this debate continued with the Quraysh, no confusion arose about God's being or His attributes. They had adopted idolatry because it was their ancestral religion. They did not indulge in fabricating excessively needless distinctions in reasoning to support their beliefs simply because they were illiterate. In Madīnah, however, as soon as the people of the Book became involved in this debate, a new dimension was added to the affair. In spite of being the recipients of Holy Books, they had become incriminated with outrageous forms of polytheism. The only difference was that they had invented a set system to support their beliefs. In this regard, the weird Christian mythology, in particular, was a fantastic production, unrivalled as far as the complications and confusions it had created. The Qur'ān challenged all of them and exposed their heresies upon them. Some among them accepted faith while others who did not were intellectually defeated by the Qur'ān to the extent that the Arabs were no longer overawed by their religious superiority.

The new situation called for the revelation of a *sūrah* that would root out all traces of polytheism of both the Idolaters and the People of the Book, and would also put a complete halt to Satan's incursions in the concept of *tawhīd*. Needless to say that it had to be both concise and comprehensive to enable everyone to learn and memorize its contents. As a result, this *sūrah* comprising four very short verses was revealed. The profound meanings it encompasses prompted many scholars to regard it as being a third of the Qur'ān. A little contemplation shows that there is no exaggeration in this fact. The message of the Qur'ān can be divided into three distinct topics: *tawhīd* (monotheism), *risālah* (prophethood) and *ma'ād* (hereafter) – which means that *tawhīd* occupies one third of the Qur'ānic content that is scattered in various *sūrahs*. Its core is epitomized in this comprehensive *sūrah*. In other words, the gist of the Qur'ānic arguments by which it refutes polytheism is concisely stated here.

One thing that should be kept in mind is that the words *قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ* do not necessitate that this *sūrah* was revealed because someone had inquired from the Prophet (sws) about the attributes of God; but as is indicated earlier, the very circumstances in which the question of *tawhīd* had become a burning topic were enough to cause its revelation. *قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ* means “the God about whom you are debating and arguing has these attributes;

hear them from me ...,” after which these attributes are stated. Suffice it to say that to reform heretical beliefs, only a correct knowledge of these attributes is all that is required after which the path to the appreciation of other attributes of God is opened.

The word **الله** is a noun used for the personal name of God, and the Idolaters of Arabia always regarded it so. The Qur’ān ascribes all virtuous and gracious attributes of God to this noun. The verse says that God is **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad). Linguists clearly differentiate between **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad) and **وَاحِدٌ** (Wāḥid). **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad) means someone in whose being none can be associated, and **وَاحِدٌ** (Wāḥid) means someone in whose attributes none can be associated. Probably this is the reason why the word **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad) has never been used as an attribute other than that of God. This attribute also necessitates that He have no kin or relations, and at the same time it warrants that He be unique and peerless in every sense. It also follows from this that God is uncreated and has always existed, and that everything else has been created and brought into existence. Naturally, someone who is foremost out of His own accord should always exist because if at one time He never was, then it cannot be said of Him that He always existed. Summing up the discussion, two things must necessarily be accepted: Firstly, God has always existed, and secondly, everything except Him is His creation. These are the two necessary outcomes of His uniqueness and to deny both of these would be against sense and reason.

## الله الصَّمَدُ<sup>2</sup>

By the word **صَّمَدٌ** (Ṣamad) is actually meant a large rock behind which refuge is sought from an enemy attack. It is because of this root meaning that it is also used for the leader of a nation, who is a resort and a refuge for his people. In many Holy scriptures, particularly in the Psalms of David, God has been called a rock, and has also been addressed as the rock of help<sup>3</sup>.

The attribute **صَّمَدٌ** (Ṣamad) is mentioned after **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad) to explain and qualify the meanings of **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad), just as the attribute **حَمِيدٌ** (Ḥamīd) (worthy of all praise) is always mentioned immediately after the attribute, **غَنِيٌّ** (Ghanī) (free of all needs) in the Qur’ān. The attribute, **غَنِيٌّ** (Ghanī) might create a misconception that since God is free of all needs and is above His creation, no relationship can be established with Him. This may cause people to worship other deities as a means to obtain His

2. He is with everyone.

3 . The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer. (Psalms:18)

nearness. The attribute **حَمِيدٌ** (Ḥamīd) is stated immediately afterwards for the reason that this misconception should not even originate. It clarifies that though He does not need any one and is above and beyond His creation, yet He is the fountainhead of all praises and thanksgivings. As such everyone should turn to Him and directly seek Him, and never turn to others in despair.

Owing to exactly the same reasons, the attribute **صَمَدٌ** (Ṣamad) here is mentioned immediately after the attribute **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad). It serves to caution and prod someone who might become overwhelmed with the concept of God's uniqueness and aloofness from all, and regard Him as a detached and an unconcerned Creator. This might subsequently lead him to worship other beings as a means to procure His nearness. This can never happen if the implications of **صَمَدٌ** (Ṣamad) are properly understood. There is no doubt that God is free of all needs and above and beyond His creation, yet at the same time He provides and sustains them, hears and answers their calls of distress and fulfils their physical and spiritual needs. He is a rock behind which refuge can be sought – a haven and sanctuary for all.

It would be appropriate to mention here the cause which has so often led a people astray as regards its religious beliefs and opened for them the way to polytheism. This has been invariably due to the fact that they did not maintain a balance between certain complementary pairs of attributes of God. An acute bias towards one of them often made them completely overlook the qualifications and stipulations warranted by its counterpart. The Jews and the Christians, in particular, can be cited as examples in this regard.

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ (٣)<sup>4</sup>

The word **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad) also implies this meaning as pointed out before. Matters which may cause gross misconceptions are stressed more than once in the Qur'ān in various styles so that the true concept becomes so evident that no one may have an excuse to deny it. So, the whole issue is restated here in this verse in another way. We must bear in mind that the Arabs also had a mythology of their own which was very similar in detail to the Greek and Hindu mythologies. The Idolaters regarded the angels to be the daughters of God. Although the Jews were the recipients of the Torah, yet they regarded 'Uzayr as the son of God. The Christians had established the Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Their prejudice for Trinity took them so far that at one time their priests,

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4. He is neither anyone's father nor anyone's son.

at whose hands people accepted Christianity, made their converts curse the God whose attributes are spelled out in this *sūrah*. Indeed, the anger and the venom they had for this *sūrah* was because the concept of *tawhīd* expressed in it had made a direct hit upon their beliefs. Considering it, God could be regarded neither as a father nor a son, nor could anyone be regarded as His mother.

Historically, the Qur'ān was the first to kindle the light of *tawhīd* in this world in such a profound manner. This fact is now being acknowledged even by people who at one time were confined in the shackles of national and religious prejudices, and were in no way willing to come out and face the reality. The Christians, who once cursed the God whose attributes are mentioned in this *sūrah*, have now people among them who openly acclaim that the Qur'ān was the foremost in enlightening the world with the true concept of *tawhīd* in such a profound manner.

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ<sup>5</sup> (٤)

كُفُوًا means “equal, like, peer, match, similar”. This verse means that Allah has no parallel or equal. He is the Creator and all other things are His creation. Everyone has needs while He has none. All need Him while He needs none. Everyone is mortal while He is the only immortal.

Summing up, the message of the *sūrah* lies in the concept of *tawhīd* it brings out by mention of certain complementary pairs of attributes of God. The essence of which is that God has always existed and shall always exist; He was when there was nothing and shall remain when everything ceases to be; He is complete and entire in His being and is above all needs; everyone needs Him while He needs none; He is a refuge for all and on Him everyone depends; He brings everything into existence, and by His orders everything is destroyed; He is father to none nor has He a father; He is the Creator and the Cherisher of all and fashions and sustains everything; nothing is from His substance and being; He has no peer or equal and indeed all are His servants and slaves.

With the grace of God, the explanation of this *sūrah* ends here. فَالْحَمْدُ  
أَوَّلًا وَآخِرًا (so gratitude be to Him at all times)

Lahore,  
25<sup>th</sup> July, 1980 AD  
11 Ramadān, 1400 AH

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5. And there is none like Him.